

Stranger Things Have Happened by Charlie_Parker

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Heather Marshall, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Steve Harrington x Heather Marshall, Steve Harrington x OC

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Summary:

A Big City girl Heather Marshall moves to Hawkins to live with her aunt and uncle after the tragic death of her geneticist father. Of course, Steve Harrington hits her with his car. From there sprouts something more.

1. Cold Wind Madness

“Oh god. Oh god oh god oh god.” Steve Harrington’s voice came from the front seat of the car that just hit Heather Marshall. When she tried to breathe through her nose, Heather got the metallic taste of blood in her throat. Everything was either sore or numb and she was pretty sure her arm was bent at the wrong angle.

“You came out of nowhere!” Steve was yelling, panicking as he was driving and frantically passing a hand through his hair, trying to keep his leg from jumping as he hit the gas.

“Just don’t hit anyone else getting me to the hospital.” Heather coughed, leaning over so the entire front face of her broken, aching body was spread out across the leather seats of Steve’s car. After he’d hit her with his car when he ignored a stop sign, he’d basically thrown the unknown girl into his car. Her fear of having just been kidnapped subsided when she recognized him through the eye that had swollen up closed. He was the guy who walked around Hawkins High School like he owned the joint. He dated her cousin Nancy. That was Steve Harrington. Now her cooled nerves were flaring up again when she saw how he panicked so much. He hadn’t meant to hit her, she was just on Nancy’s bike, enjoying her priority of the road when he barrelled over at her blaring Prince’s Raspberry Beret.

The next time she heard that song was on a portable radio in the waiting salon of the emergency room. Steve had helped her check in and waited in a chair next to her. Her wounds weren’t considered urgent enough, and that either infuriated Steve or reassured him enough to staying quiet next to Heather, bouncing his leg and crossing his arms. “Should I call someone for you?” He asked after a moment.

“I live with the Wheelers. Might be a good idea to call them up.” Heather sighed, leaning her head back against the wall and closing her eyes, holding her arm that throbbed with a stabbing pain.

Steve looked at her, eyes wide as he shook his head “Nancy’s gonna kill me. Are you cousin Heather? From Indianapolis?”

“Close. Chicago.”

“Chicago.” He nodded “Nancy’s gonna kill me.”

She was silent, not really able to talk much. Heather was pretty sure if she started trying to talk, she’d scream. Everything hurt.

“God, I must have helped fuck up your year pretty fucking bad. I’m

so sorry.” Steve had gotten the low down from Nancy on why Heather would be living with them.

Heather’s coughing fit masked what she was saying, making Steve lean closer “What?”

“I said watch your fucking mouth. There are kids here.” Steve didn’t know if she was laughing through her cough or not, but he was laughing a little too.

Considering what she had lived through this past year, getting hit by a car wasn’t the event that would break her. Not after the year Heather Marshall had. Not by a long shot. “Heather Marshall. I’d shake your hand but I think you broke it.”

“I’m so sorry.” He kept apologizing “Steve Harrington.”

“Could you call my aunt for me, Steve?” Heather murmured, eyes closing as a wave of pain came over her.

“Yeah. I’ll be right back.” Steve stood up and fixed the waistband of his Levi’s and strutted over to the corner wall, sliding a quarter out of his pocket and ringing Nancy, knowing the number by heart.

“Hey, Nance. It’s Steve.”

“Steve? What...Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” he cleared his throat and scratched the back of his neck awkwardly “Look, we have a problem. I...hityourcousinwithmycarandI’m supersorryandit’llneverhappenagain.”

“Steve, slow down. Did you say you hit my cousin with your car?”

“And it’ll never happen again.”

“Is she alright?!”

“Well I hit her with my car, so, frankly, she’s not looking too hot, Nance.”

“Oh my god.”

“She’s at the hospital. I’m waiting with her to get into the emergency room. Could you get your parents down here so they can take care of...this?”

“Yeah. We’ll be right over.” She hung up without saying goodbye.

Steve’s swagger turned into a trudge, the top halves of his hands in his front pockets as he walked back to sit down next to Heather.

“They’ll be there in a bit.”

“Thank you.”

“Least I could do.”

Heather shrugged. It was the bare minimum.

“God, I’m such a shit.” Steve sighed and rubbed his hands over his face, leaning his elbows on to his knees.

"Hey, hey, you're not a shit. Don't say that. Everybody has hit somebody with their car before."

"Are you fucking serious?" He turned his head back to look at her "Look at you!"

"Trust me, emotionally, I've gone through like three point five times worse."

"I'm so sorry."

"You drove me here and you just called the Wheelers. It's fine. We're good."

"No we're not."

"You can leave."

"Like hell."

They fell silent and stayed that way until the Wheelers arrived, Heather's aunt the first to greet her "Oh honey, how long have you been out here? What happened?"

"I-" She saw Steve, out of the corner of her eyes, and lied convincingly "I grilled a stop sign. Steve had the right of way and I didn't think he was gonna actually hit me so I kept going."

Mr. Wheeler, from the back, groaned tiredly "Why would you do that?"

"Because I'm a stupid teenager with a Christ complex, Ted."

It was Nancy and Karen who walked you to a nurse, Steve awkwardly looking at Mike and Eleven, who were just at the house when Nancy got the call and came out of solidarity (and also because his mom said it would be rude not to go).

"You hit her with your car, didn't you?" Mike's arms were crossed, giving Steve a Look.

"I didn't ask her to lie about it." Steve's hands shot up innocently as he admitted guilt.

"Friends don't lie." El spoke, sitting down next to Steve where Heather had been.

"Well I'm not entirely sure we're friends, so there goes your rule."

"Mike lied."

Steve looked up from his hands to Eleven "What do you mean?"

"To keep me safe. Mike lied. And Hopper."

"That's kind of different."

"Not really." Eleven looked down at her feet as they dangled down from the chair.

"Where is Hopper anyway?"

"El was over for a party meeting."

“Oh yeah?”

“Uh huh.” Mike juttled out his chin.

“So where’s the rest of the party?” Steve smiled knowingly.

“Shut up.” Mike rolled his eyes and walked away. Eleven stayed quiet, still sitting next to Steve. He was about to start making conversation with her when she decided to slide off the seat and go find Mike.

He waited until the Wheelers were gone, still feeling awkward about being around them. He didn’t usually actively avoid it, but if he could he would. And he didn’t want Nance getting the wrong idea of him with her cousin. That’s why with an hour left of visiting time, he snuck into the room while they were getting dinner before checking Heather out of the hospital.

When Steve saw Heather, that guilty gnawing in his stomach took a bite out of his heart and spit it out into his throat. “Hey, you.” His voice was quiet as he leaned against the wall next to the door, keeping his distance out of fear of seeing it worse from closer up.

Heather had bandages covering her entire chest, an ice pack on her head, one arm in a cast, and her leg suspended up in the air, a cast around her ankle “Hey, I thought you’d bounced.” Heather’s voice was rough, dehydrated.

“Nah. Hopper’s checking out my car for the insurance reps.”

“Sorry if my body left such a dent.” She laughed and ended up coughing, her shoulders shaking. Seeing the look on Steve’s face she shook her head “Cool your jets, I just caught a little cold a few days ago.”

He walked over to the side of her bed, finding a plastic pitcher of water and a cup on the little table next to her. When Heather gesticulated to take the cup in hand, Steve shook his head “Don’t strain yourself.”

Resigned, Heather nodded and carefully tipped her head back and parted her lips so he could help her drink. His hand found its way to the base of her neck where she flinched from the bruise he touched, which spilled water all over her. “Fuck, I’m so sorry!”

Heather shook her head “It’s fine.”

“No, it’s not! It’s freezing in here and now you’re soaked, and I hit you with my car, and you’re already sick, and I’m just making everything worse. I’m such a fuck-up.” Heather wasn’t sure if he was saying that more to her or to himself.

“Steve.” Her voice made his gaze snap back up to her as he had

grabbed a bunch of paper towels from next to the sink in the corner of the room. "You're not a fuck up. Accidents happen. It's nice of you to apologize but you gotta stop buggin', man."

He nodded and carefully pressed the paper towels to her chest and abdomen where the fresh water had spilled. It was awkward, to say the least. Steve was bowing his head down to hide his blushing and Heather was looking anywhere but him. "So, since we're getting so familiar," She laughed nervously while fixing her gaze on a particular ceiling square "Maybe you could tell me something about yourself."

"Uh...God, you're cold." He felt her cold skin now slightly damp from the water he spilled.

"Thanks." The smile that slipped from her lips was crooked, teasing.

"That's not what I meant."

"Sure, Harrington." She laughed a little, letting him know she was making fun of him.

He smiled a little too, tucking her back in carefully and sitting bow-legged in the chair by her bedside "My father sells cars just off the road that leads to the highway towards Indianapolis."

"Oh yeah. I see where that spot is. It's always got that balloon man dancing around."

"Yeah." Steve smiled, remembering when he was a really little kid and they had just set up the advertising balloon. He'd imitated its dance until he got dizzy and puked all over himself. His mother was so mad when he went back to it after she had just cleaned him up.

"Do you work for him?"

"My dad?"

"Yeah."

"Nah, I couldn't sell a car. I mean, I'm gonna have to, but I know I won't be good at it."

"Why do you think that?"

"I've never done it."

"That doesn't mean you'll be bad at it. Who knows, you might be a natural."

"Or an inexperienced failure."

"It's 50/50." Heather smiled and shrugged "You said you were gonna have to start selling cars. Why is that?"

"I'm not going to college."

"Why not?"

"I'm too stupid to go to college, Heather."

"Bullshit."

“What?”

“I said bullshit, Harrington.”

“Oh yeah? And how are you such a fucking expert in how smart I am?”

“I’m not. But I’ve never met anyone who went to college thinking it was gonna be easy.”

Steve shook his head, wanting to change the subject “What did you used to do in Chicago?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean: you went to school and then what?”

“You know House Music? Like New Order and the Talking Heads?”

“A little.”

“It came from a basement not too far away from where I lived. When I came home from school I would get with this group and they’d let me use their stuff to make new beats.”

“You’re a musician?”

“Not in the classical sense, but yeah.”

“Like an MC?”

“How does a boy like you in a town like this know about MCs?”

Steve smiled a little and shrugged “It’s not really my jam, but when I went to visit my grandparents in the Big Apple, a cousin’s friend got me into the underground.”

“You went to the Bronx?”

“Yeah, no big.” He acted like he hadn’t been scared shitless to go into the Bronx.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Believe it, baby.”

“Who did you see?”

“This Iced Tea guy. I wasn’t really into it so I don’t remember it too well.”

“Ice-T?”

“Look, fineness. I don’t know.”

“Dude.” Heather smiled “you don’t remember because you got fucked up.”

“Eat my shorts, Marshall.”

“You wish, Harrington.”

2. Things Can Only Get Better

Summary for the Chapter:

This chapter does have slur words against the LGBTQ community in reference to HIV/AIDS

It had been a week since the car accident. Heather woke up on that seventh day still feeling sore, broken, and physically helpless, but less so than the days prior. She was ready to get back to Hawkins High and finish up the rest of her senior year. Since the Wheelers hadn't been able to take her shopping for an alarm clock, Nancy was asked to come knock on her door in the morning to make sure she woke up. By the time the knocks came, Heather had been awake for seven and a half minutes.

"Thanks Nance!" Her voice cracked from the morning's dehydration.

"No problem." Nancy responded, clearly in the middle of a yawn, her pink bunny slippers making no sound as they trudged her back to her room to get dressed.

The night had been restless and too hot. Summer was coming to Hawkins, Indiana and it seemed like whatever cold Heather had caught was giving her fever dreams to accompany the sticky night heat.

When Heather managed herself downstairs, Nancy gave her a small smile and a look, sitting across from her cutting into her pancake "You look nice." Living in a big city as a teenage girl, Heather had learned not to dress too nice to go out, but considering the apparent safety of a small town, she permitted herself some liberties of making herself look 'like a girl' as Mike had called it. She'd started doing this two days ago a little after Steve had dropped by.

"So do you." Heather deflected with a cheery smile.

"Isn't Steve driving you today?" Mike said, looking up at Heather.

"Yeah."

Nancy nodded and looked down at her plate "Oh."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Nance..." Heather sighed and leaned back in her chair "I can tell him after today that he shouldn't come by if you don't want him hanging around. He just feels guilty for hitting me with his car."

"No, yeah, obviously. You should go with him. He's nice." Nancy nodded

"Is Jonathan picking you up?"

"Yeah."

"Cool."

"Yeah."

Mike rolled his eyes at the tension that had faded to silence and got up from the table.

Eager to cut through that awkward silence, Mrs. Wheeler smiled at her son and said "Have a good day at school today, honey!"

Mike's voice from the garage called out "You too!" following a door slamming shut.

"Did he just say 'you to-'" Mr. Wheeler had just begun to speak when a knock came from the front door.

"I GOT IT!" Both girls barked though Nancy was the only one physically capable of lunging for the door the way she did.

"Jonathan." She smiled, greeting her boyfriend, grabbing her bag and calling back to the rest of the family "See you guys!"

"Bye!"

It was a tense three minutes of waiting, most of which Heather spent either poking at her food with her fork to tempt herself into eating more and nervously glancing at the kitchen oven clock.

"He's lat-" Maybe one day Ted wouldn't get interrupted by the doorbell.

"I'll get it." Karen smiled kindly and slipped from the table, seeing as they were going to treat Heather like she had broken both legs instead of just one arm and her clavicle.

"Hey, Mrs. Wheeler. Is Heather ready?" He smiled and walked in, used to the routine of picking up Nancy that meant he waited in the foyer.

"Yes, she's in the dining room." She smiled and Heather looking over nervously, gulping down some mysterious anxiety that had built up in her throat, seeing Steve poking his head over to smile at her and wave.

"Hey. Morning!" Steve walked over to her "How are you feeling?" He bit his bottom lip. Was he nervous?

"Morning." She smiled a little and nodded "I'm ready to go." Not knowing how to politely prompt that she was really ready to leave the house.

"Oh, yeah. Of course." He nodded, cleared his throat, and his hand

went to the back of her chair to carefully pull it out for her to get up. "It's fine. I can get up on my own." A light pink hue on her cheeks that Steve would have usually noticed had he not also been wearing it too.

"Sorry I'm a little late. Wait – hey – no, let me get that." He picked up her backpack and let it hang from one shoulder and offered his other arm to help her balance on her feet.

"Dude."

"Too much?"

"A little. I've got a broken arm and clavicle. My rib fracture is healing pretty well. I'm not gonna fall and splinter into little pieces." Heather sighed, walking ahead of him to the foyer and spotting his car in front of the house. Her head tilted to the side curiously when she saw a mop of brown hair moving about in the back seat "Is that Dustin?" She recognized him from the times 'The Party' met at the Wheelers' to play Dungeons and Dragons.

"Yeah. You know each other? I noticed it rained last night and he might not want to take his bike to school today."

"That's why you're two minutes late?" She smiled a little, walking up to the car with him.

"Yeah, I'm sorry about that."

"It's fine." Heather reached for the car door and found that Steve had beaten her to the punch and opened the passenger car door.

"Wait a second, Harrington!" Dustin's voice came from the backseat "That whole bullshit about my safety and not going in the front seat was for Heather?"

"Shut up, Henderson." Steve got in the driver's seat and looked at Heather as he started the car and mouthed his apologies.

Dustin managed to hit Steve's arm with his baseball cap "Don't apologize about me! I'm a damn pleasure to have around!"

"He's not wrong." Heather laughed

Steve rose a brow "Do you want to walk?"

"You'd throw a cripple like me out in the street?" She teased him, a hand over her heart with a feigned shocked expression.

Harrington shook his head and scoffed, fixing his rearview mirror.

"Thin ice, Henderson." He warned, but his warning was obviously half-hearted. He let the radio play on low while driving towards the Middle School.

"So when's the next party meeting?" Heather smiled

"Oh, did you like playing?" Dustin smiled back at her as she turned

her head to look at him. Steve reached over to make sure she wasn't going to hurt herself turning like that.

"Yeah, I totally dig it. I hadn't played before."

"Really? You were an awesome rogue."

"I did my best. You guys were really nice to help me learn the game. I know I must've thrown you guys out of your usual routine."

"It's no trouble." Dustin nodded, even though Mike and Lucas had been seriously frustrated when she had asked 'How much do I need to roll to do this?' for the twentieth time in an hour about an action that involved the same skill.

"Alright, Henderson. This is your stop." Steve cleared his throat as he pulled up to the drop off loop.

"Have a good day." Heather offered with a wave as the middle schooler climbed out of the BMW and waved back to both of them.

When Dustin disappeared into the sea of middle schoolers looking for their friends before heading into the building, Heather turned to Steve "That was really sweet of you to drive him."

Steve shrugged and started to speed up as they joined back the main road "No big."

"How do you know each other?"

"Oh well, you know," He awkwardly scratched the base of his neck "when I came over to Nancy's and they had the party meetings at the same time..." He couldn't tell her about the demodogs, could he?

"Right, of course." She nodded and turned her head to look out of the passenger side window.

"How are you feeling?"

"Better." She nodded with a tight-lipped smile. "Really. I feel fine."

"Are you still sick?"

"A little. I think it's going away." Heather took a deep breath through her nose. She'd convinced herself the weird dreams are what her aunt reassured her they were— just troubled dreams from a grieving mind.

"Yeah?"

"I think so."

Steve nodded and said "If you're not okay, you can tell me. I won't throw a fit or anything."

"Oh, I love this song." Heather said unconvincingly. Steve nodded and turned the volume knob up. Knowing she was hiding something from him on purpose left a sour taste in his mouth. Nevermind the fact that they had seen each other before twice – once when he hit her with his car and the other when he came by two days ago to offer

his services as a ride to school.

When he pulled up to the High School, Steve checked his watch "Thirty minutes 'till the bell rings. Did you want to go find Nancy or some other friends?" Steve bit his lip as he looked around. After everything that had happened last year and the year before, he'd grown away from his old friends. It left him alone for the most part.

"Nah, I'm good." The short answer gave Steve some pause.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah." Heather looked down at her fingers and played with the small ring she'd had on her middle finger. She couldn't remember where she'd got it. Maybe a yard sale five years ago.

"Heather."

"It's nothing."

"So there's something."

"It's-"

"-something." Steve said and turned to face her, one hand languidly resting on the steering wheel. "Tell me what's wrong."

"It's just some assholes, I guess."

"What'd they say?"

"They're just giving me shit about my dad."

Steve scoffed and rolled his eyes, biting his cheek "Unbelievable."

"I know. But, I mean, I don't really give a shit what they think about me. And I don't make a big secret about what happened. It's just that I rather not walk down the halls and have people call me Fag Child or AIDS Baby."

Steve nodded, looking around the parking lot suddenly ready to fuck up every single one of these assholes. "Tell you what,"

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to all your classes with you."

"No, Steve, come on-"

"Heather, you can't carry your backpack. Someone needs to be there for you."

"I'll find people..."

"I'm people!"

"Fine, okay. Thank you." Heather smiled a little, completely recognizing what he was doing for her. He was skipping class in order to use his status to shield her from what other people would yell at her if he weren't there.

"Are those aviators?" Steve noticed, the glasses that had glinted from the sunlight hung around the opening of her shirt.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve got an idea.” Him suddenly leaning over made Heather’s heart stop a little “Chill out.” He laughed and took his sunglasses, squarer and darker than her aviators, and carefully placed them on the bridge of her nose, brushing back strands of hair behind her ears to make the temples rest on her ears. “Bitchin’. Okay, now hand me yours.” His smile was sideways.

Heather had to admit, her sunglasses looked just as good on him as they did on her. “I don’t understand what this has to do with anything.”

Steve shrugged and finally turned off the engine of the car “Just trust me. Here’s some gum.” He passed her a stick of it.

“Thanks, but why?”

“Do you trust me?”

“I guess.”

“Do you trust me?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, then get chewin’, MC Rogue.” He winked at her and jumped out of the car, fixing the collar of his denim jacket.

“You know,” Heather shut the car door behind her as she walked to meet up with Steve who was holding both of their backpacks, one on each shoulder “House Music and Hip-Hop have nothing to do with each other, musically speaking.”

“I knew that.”

“Uh-huh.” Heather looked up at him and gave him a knowing look.

“What? I did!”

“Okay, Harrington. So the plan is to act like I’m your girlfriend, right? So people don’t fuck with me? Because no one wants to fuck with you?” She caught on quick.

“Exactly.”

“Not a stupid idea.” She smiled as they walked into the building. Heather stifled her laugh when she slipped her hand into the back pocket of his Levi’s and he jumped in surprise “What? Too much?”

“No, very convincing.”

“Alright. Just tell me when it gets too much. I can be the most convincing fake girlfriend you’ve ever seen.”

“I won’t hold back if you don’t.”

“Is that a warning or a challenge?”

“I don’t know. What do you think?” Steve smiled down at her, pushing the aviators further up onto the bridge of his nose.

3. Take On Me

Summary for the Chapter:

This chapter contains slur words used against the LGBTQ+ community in reference to HIV/AIDS

“Oh shit.” Heather hadn’t heard Steve speaking in a while. She figured he was just enjoying his sandwich across from her in the cafeteria.

“What?” Heather looked over her shoulders a little paranoically “Is everything okay?”

He closed his eyes and groaned a little.

“I’m assuming that’s not from the sandwich.”

“No. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m seeing a pattern emerging. What’s wrong? What are you sorry about?”

“I have basketball practice after school.”

“So?”

“So I can’t drive you back.”

“It’s fine. I can just walk.”

“Absolutely not. You’ve got a cold.”

“It’s hot out. I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“No, that’s ridiculous.”

“There’s the bus.”

“Do you have the pass to get on?”

“I’m sorry, the what?”

“Damn it.” Steve put his sandwich down and looked at Heather, passing a hand through his hair.

Heather’s eyes caught one strand of hair his movement had disheveled. “Wait a sec, hold still.” She leaned over the table and fixed his hair. Steve stiffened as he saw her move towards him and carefully bowed his head when he noticed her hand go to his coveted locks. When he felt her fingertips on his hair he got a shiver down his neck. He barely let himself touch his hair, his entire crown touch starved.

“Uh, Heather, what are you-”

“There.”

“What’d you do?” Steve pretended he wasn’t panicking.

"You just had a little out of place."

"Oh." Steve wasn't convinced, his dodging eyes and the gnawing at his lips told as much. Heather rolled her eyes and reached into her bag and pulled out a pocket mirror to show him. "See?"

Steve turned his head a few times to see it better before sniffing a little and nodding to himself "Okay. Cool. Thanks, babe."

"No problem." As Heather was stuffing back her mirror into the front pocket of her bag, she froze and looked up at Steve "Did you just 'babe' me?"

Steve had frozen as well, about to take a bite from his sandwich. 'Stay cool. Be cool. You are cool.' He kept telling himself, saying while keeping his mouth open "Yeah, duh."

"Uh-huh."

Steve shrugged and took a bite of his sandwich, pretending he wasn't caught off guard by what he had said.

Steve jolted in his seat when a harsh clap on his shoulder from behind took him by surprise. "Who've you got there, Harrington?" The wannabe cowboy set his foot next to Steve on the lunch bench and looked over at who everyone was telling him was Steve's new girlfriend Heather.

"I'm Heather." She told him, not needing Steve to introduce her.

"Heather." The stranger nodded "I'm Billy. Friend of Steve's. You're Nancy Wheeler's cousin, right?"

He offered his hand to shake and, though admittedly taken a little aback by the formality, Heather reached to shake his hand. When he had her hand in his, it was his touch that was light and airy despite his hard gaze on her. 'Two can play at that game' She told herself before responding with a bone crushing firmness and a girly, charming smile "Enchanté."

Steve was awkwardly watching the interaction, trying to figure out what he should be doing if he was Heather's real boyfriend. She seemed to have a handle on the situation and though Steve was not afraid to fight Billy again, he would like to avoid it at all costs. Billy was probably the one person he couldn't completely shield Heather from. "Your girl's got a firm grip, amigo." Billy laughed out of the corner of his mouth and broke the shake.

"I pack a pretty hard punch too." She replied sweetly.

Billy's smile fell and he clearly understood the threat underlying her words "See you at practice, Harrington?"

"Yeah." Steve nodded, looking down at his can of lemonade.

"Heather, watch yourself."

"Only if I need to, Billy." She replied and waved him off with Disney-like coquettishness.

When Billy walked out of the lunchroom, Steve turned to her with wide eyes and leaned over "Are you fucking crazy?"

"What? He's just a thug, Steve. Are you gonna eat all of your chips?"

"Nah but can I get your grapes? He can beat the shit out of you, Heather."

"Do you ever just chill out?"

"No! Not really! I'm trying to keep you safe."

"With all due respect, Steve, I think I've been through more shit than you. I can deal with Billy the Kid over there."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

The look in his eyes lit a fire in Heather's chest "He hurt you."

"Heath-"

"When?"

"Does it matter?"

"No."

"Just don't do anything stupid, okay? I only fought him because there wasn't any other way. The guy is an animal."

Heather wanted to tell him how she didn't care, she'd beat the shit out of this Billy amateur whenever, wherever. The look on his face gave her serious pause and she nodded, looking down and passing him her mini tupperware full of grapes "Okay."

"Besides, if you die before I ask you out on a real date I'm gonna be really ticked."

"Wouldn't want that." Heather smiled, slipping her hand over to the bag of chips and taking a few. "So, how are we fixing this basketball practice conundrum?" Heather popped a few chips into her mouth and bounced her eyebrows. "I can throw on a cheerleading uniform and be so supportive."

"Your arm and clavicle are broken."

"So supportive." She nodded.

Steve shook his head and smiled "You don't mind waiting?"

That smile he had on his lips was enough for her to give up on pretending she didn't think he was the most attractive boy she'd ever seen. "Usually yes. But I'd make an exception for you."

Needless to say, Steve wasn't so accustomed to have a girl flirt with him first or as much as he did. It almost felt like a competition. "I can make it up to you."

"Is that so?" She hummed, leaning over so her chin rested on her hand.

"Yeah. How does going to see that new movie 'Back to the Future' sound?" The movie had been the headlining act in movie theaters all over the United States during the summer of 1985. It was supposed to be all the rage.

"Sure."

"Ace." 'Act like it is not that big of deal' Steve gave a small smirk before drinking a sip.

"So romantic."

"Oh, you want me to get all squishy around you?" He really wanted to, as much as he pretended like he wasn't the type to do that.

"As much as I'd love to see that—" Heather was cut off by a group behind her calling her fagot. Her face tensed, jaw locked and her shoulders grew closer to her neck. She closed her eyes and tried to ignore them. Steve was fixing them with a warning, icy stare but Billy's drop-by had obviously questioned Steve's authority and now everyone was free to take shots at her. Steve figured if he had to finish the day punching people in the face, he wouldn't mind doing that for her.

"Hey!" One of them, a short boy with a buzzcut of black hair started throwing pieces of his sandwich at her to get her attention.

"Just pretend like they aren't there." Heather spoke through clenched teeth.

"Did your fag daddy give you his gay cancer, Marshall?"

Steve stood up and glared at them, but the retort didn't come from him, "Will you shut the fuck up already?" Heather turned around on the bench and looked at them directly "Are you really so fucking stupid that you can't think of anything better to do than to throw your lunch at me?"

"It's fun, dyke bitch."

"You sound just like your mother last night, Simmons. Except it sounded like she was enjoying herself more than you are." Heather seethed, trying to make it seem like them talking about her father didn't bother her so much. The welt that built in her throat was about to become unavoidable, and the stunned silence that her words gained her gave her enough time to stride away from the lunchroom, leaving her stuff to find the restroom.

Heather was too busy in her own head to ever expect seeing Steve Harrington in the girls' restroom. Even when she noticed his presence

she continued looking down into the sink and gripping its cool, faux-porcelain edges, trying to refuse herself the sobs that were escaping her. Her father's body had only been cold three weeks before she was sent to live with her aunt. She told her mother's sister what she'd been told to say: Mom can't take care of me right now. Would it be okay to stay with you guys for a while? She'd shown up with an envelope full of money to cover her costs on the household and gotten the guest room in exchange. Now her father had been dead a whole month and a half and all Heather was waiting for was to hear when her mother would pass. When she'd been sent away the doctors still had no clue how much time she had left, but living with AIDS meant not being able to take care of her daughter so the widowed Mrs. Marshall had sent her daughter away.

"Hey, don't listen to them, okay? They're a bunch of assholes." Steve spoke, keeping his distance. He wasn't one to impose on someone who was so upset. He was the kind to make sure that person knew he was there if they needed a shoulder to cry on. That is, until he noticed the pieces of bologna in her hair. "Come here." He said quietly, leaning against the sink next to hers and fishing out the pieces one by one, his hand occasionally touching her face – sometimes by accident. "I'm sorry about your dad. And the whole situation. You deserve better."

Heather sniffled "How do you know what I deserve?"

"Because no one deserves what you went through." He looked down at her with a small, supportive smile, his hand resting on the side of her face. If she wasn't so upset she'd be nervous by how close Steve had gotten to her.

"Can I tell you something you can't tell anyone else?"

Steve nodded "Of course."

"My mom's got it too." The truth had been eating at her. Her father had it, he'd given it to her mother. Heather felt like she could be next. And even then, the very fact that she had hidden her mother's sickness made her insides feel raw. When her dad got sick, she had her mother to console her and share a pain with. Now, it was like Heather was on a deserted island carrying a backpack full of rocks. "They said it transfers through blood. I don't know what that means. I don't know what's wrong with me if there's anything that's going to happen to me. I don't know when my mom is gonna die. Steve, I'm just so scared. I don't care what they say out there. That's not what's eating me alive." Heather's vision blurred halfway with tears. All she

could do was close her eyes and breathe as deeply as she could (which wasn't much). Her pain didn't subside when Steve's arms wound around her and brought his chest against her so she could hide her face against his shoulder. But, it did help remind her she was far from a deserted island.

4. Head Over Heels

The morning Heather woke up was two weeks after seeing Back to the Future with Steve. The date had gone relatively well and the only reason it had finished at her doorstep with a kiss on the cheek was because she had still some semblance of being under the weather. The fluttering sensation in her chest every time she saw him now or even thought about that date reminded her time and time again how she wasn't alone, even when she physically was.

Having woken up with a fever, Heather had chosen not to go to school. Her nights were plagued with strange dreams: montages of a girl with a shaved head and a bloody nose, her father's old classroom at Northwestern, search parties in unmarked vans, too many syringes to count holding death itself. The phrase over and over being repeated: Death by self-destruction. The phrase was sometimes interjected with low growling sounds or a deep, loud, echoing sound. It felt like her brain was being tickled and for some reason, Heather felt like in her dreams she had yet to break through a boundary. But what was that threshold she hoped to cross?

A knock on her door broke her away from these thoughts, leading to a small coughing fit. Turning to look up at the door, she heard Karen Wheeler say "Sweetheart? Steve came by to visit you. Are you presentable?"

'Not really' she thought to herself, managing to lean over the bed to see her messy hair and uneven skin tones along her face, eyes starting to hollow. "As ever, I guess." She managed to croak out, knowing she needed to change out of those pajamas at some point.

"I'll send him in."

Heather nodded to herself and played with her thumbs on her lap, biting her bottom lip. She finally looked up when Steve came in "Hey." He hadn't been able to sit easily in class seeing Heather's seat empty. Especially knowing what he knew about Heather's parents. He'd been scared for her. This led to the most impulsive consumption of goods he could find- A teddybear, two bouquets of flowers, a balloon that said 'Get Well Soon', and a literal bucket filled with assorted candies.

Heather couldn't help but laugh a little "Christ, how many stores did you empty?"

"Don't get me started." He smiled, sitting on the side of the mattress

and holding her hand after setting his gifts for her on her other side. "How do you feel?"

"Probably as good as I look." She smiled back at him, appreciating the kind gestures. The minute his thumb rubbed the back of her hand, she started feeling better. Like she could breathe fully again. "I don't want to get you sick..."

"Don't worry about me." Steve pressed a small kiss to her forehead, closing his eyes as he felt how warm her skin was against his lips. At least her body was fighting back the infection. "Do you have water? Ice pack? Medication? Tissues? I can go run over to town and get you some." Steve was ready to jump right into taking care of his fake-maybe soon-to-be real- girlfriend.

"Steve, it's fine."

"Are you sure? I can-"

"Today was college app day. Who did you hear back from?" She squeezed his hand gently and gave him a small smile to show her supportive excitement.

"Ah," Steve nodded and looked down, nibbling at his bottom lip. He thought he would have a bit more time to find a good way to explain his situation. "I didn't."

"What?"

"I couldn't...I don't know, Heath. I just know I wasn't going to get any letters back so,-"

"So you didn't apply at all?"

He shook his head and spoke in a slightly more upbeat tone "But you got some. I picked them up at the front desk for you." He pulled his schoolbag on to his knees and began rifling through his stuff.

"Can you read them off for me? I'm not feeling up to it right now and you have a really nice voice." She smiled at him cheesily.

Steve rolled his eyes "Alright, grandma."

"Hey!" Heather half-heartedly hit his shoulder.

"You're the one who can't find her reading glasses and thinks I am a lovely boy." He teased her, leaning closer to her with a playful smile.

"Harrington, I swear to god." She laughed "Just tell me what letters I got back."

"Alright here goes...Loyola, Northwestern, and...Hawkins Hall?" He looked up at her "You planned on staying in Hawkins?"

"I don't know. I just wanted to keep the options open." She shrugged and held herself a little protectively and looked away. She never knew if Steve would stay and whatever was happening between

them, she wanted to have a plan that wouldn't disrupt it.

"Why?"

"Don't worry about that. Decisions aren't due until like August. I have five months." She shrugged

Steve nodded and asked "Is it okay if I swing back here later today with the kids?"

"Yeah, sure. Why?"

"Party meeting. I'm driving Dustin and Max."

"Max is Billy's sister, right?"

"Yeah."

"Short, redhead, loves to skateboard?"

"That's the one."

"She might be my favorite."

"Heather!" Steve laughed and laid down next to her, gently tickling her sides "We can't have favorites!"

"But she's such a badass! I'm not even cool enough for her to talk to me!"

"Oh, honey," He teased, kissing at the corner of her jaw "she's just shy. And you are such a girl."

"I'll punch you."

"No, I mean," He wiggled his way into sitting up and kissed her shoulder "your favorite is the one you think is ignoring you. If I had known that, I would have ignored you."

"And left me for dead on the side of the road?"

"I feel like we should avoid telling people that's how we met." He laughed.

"Wait a sec. Do you actually think that ignoring a girl is the way to make her crazy about you?"

"Uh, duh." He shrugged

"Steve, that's how you get them mad AT you."

"No way! It totally works! You're just in denial."

"Oh yeah? Is that what you did with Nancy?" Her name didn't bring that sharp aching pain in his chest anymore. He'd come over so much that he'd even learned to be able to walk passed Nancy and Jonathan on the couch together to go get drinks in the kitchen for him and Heather and the kids when they all got together for party meetings (the kids had agreed to give the two older teenagers honorary status in membership).

"Well-

"Or with me?"

“That’s a special case.”

“Are you sure about that?”

Steve’s mouth was hanging a bit agape as he looked just above her head to think of something to respond “Nah you got me there. That sounds like some shitty advice, actually.”

“It really is. It’s square advice. Advice given by squares.”

“I’m not a square!”

“No, you’re right, of course.” She smiled and began tickling his sides “You’re a perfectly rounded circle.” Heather teased him and kissed at his neck as he squirmed and sputtered out laughter.

“No! No, Heather! Come oooon!” Steve was squirming and laughing, trying to get away as Heather launched herself on top of him and continued to tickle his sides, blowing raspberries into his neck. “Okay! OKAY!” He wheezed, making Heather stop “You won!”

Steve sat up as Heather got off and was panting hard, looking over his shoulder at her after a moment “You’re so dead, Marshall.” His smile was crooked as he in turn launched himself over her and began tickling anywhere he could reach.

5. Would I Lie To You?

“When’s your birthday?” Steve’s head was resting on Heather’s lap, checking out a magazine that Mrs. Wheeler had left on the coffee table next to them. Something about Mel Gibson being their first crowned sexiest man alive.

“Are you checking my horoscope?”

“What if I am?” His eyes glanced up at her from the magazine with an open-mouth smile, laughing at how she looked at him. They’d ended up camping out on the couch in the living room, expelled from the party meeting because, as Lucas put it, “You can’t spend the whole game trying to pants each other’s characters!”

“But can I get in them?” Steve had replied and everyone, including Heather, made a face and groaned about how gross he was. So they were exiled to the kingdom of Living Room-stonia. Population: 2, with a nice background sound of whatever was playing on the TV in the Wheeler’s living room.

“Tell you what.” Heather smiled, leaning back a little.

“What?”

“I’ll tell you my horoscope if you let me touch your hair.”

“You know what? I’m good. I guess you’ll have to figure out on your own what your month is gonna look like.” he shrugged, crossing his ankles over the arm of the couch.

“Do you not like it when people touch your hair?”

No, he loved it. He rarely got touched at his scalp save with his own fingers. He was just afraid of how he would react if someone did touch him there. The last time someone touched him there, they told Steve a few months later that they never loved him. What would he do if that happened again?

“It’s okay. I won’t.” Heather sighed with a small nod, her face a reassuring comfort. “I’m a Cancer.”

“Don’t say that. It’s not your fault.”

Heather looked down at Steve with the most confused, blank look “Wha-”

“Oh, you meant-”

Heather sputtered out a laugh “What did you think I meant? Christ, Steve.”

“I thought you were a Sagittarius!”

“So you forgot that Cancer is a star sign too?”

Steve sat up, needing to be upright to feel fully involved in this situation “I did not! I just thought you were hating on yourself for not being able to touch my hair!”

“Oh my god.” Heather was holding her side as she laughed.

“I know, I’m stupid.”

“No, no,” His soft brown eyes met hers with a layer of vulnerability she wasn’t sure where it was coming from “I just thought you were offended that I was a Cancer!”

“Why would...?”

“I don’t know, maybe you’re a Gemini!”

“I’m a Leo!”

“I’m not surprised!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He leaned on to his elbow and rose a brow at her, a ghost of a laugh on his lips.

“It means, ‘King Steve’,”

“What’s with the air quotes?”

“That I’m not surprised you’re a Leo.”

The feeling of his warm hands catching hers as she was putting them down from her air quotes made her heart stop for just a half of a second. “Have you heard from your mom?” His voice was quiet, above a whisper but not too far from it. He knew the subject was touchy.

Heather looked over her shoulders to make sure they weren’t being listened to. Karen and Ted had gone out to take care of different things separately they wouldn’t fully disclose. Nancy was upstairs in her room doing whatever it is Nancy does in her room. “The kids are downstairs.” Steve murmured and passed his thumb over his cupid’s bow, looking up as he bit his bottom lip.

“I haven’t heard anything.”

“Is that a good thing?”

“I don’t know.” Heather was visibly upset. The way she looked, bottom lip pushed out and eyes with a tendency to look down and away from Steve brought his hand to push his fingers through her hair at the base of her head, leaning up to remove his weight from her lap. “Don’t tell me everything will be fine.” She shook her head, the ghosts of breath tickling Steve’s lips.

He shook his head and found himself holding her again, surrounding her body as it was in a fetal position in his arms and leaning on the couch with his back against the armrest. His lips found her forehead and his thumb rubbing along the upper half of her arm. “No, but I’m

right here for whatever you hear or don't."

The longitudinal movement of her head on his chest let him know he'd reassured her as much as he could.

"Hey!" A crumpled piece of paper hit Steve with a gentle 'pok!' and his face scrunched up as he saw the top halves of the kids' heads poking up from the stairs leading to the basement.

"Dustin, leave them alone!" Max called from down the stairs.

"But they told us to get them if we wanted the second pizza!"

"It can wait!"

Hazel smiled a little and moved away from Steve, still feeling the warmth from his chest against the side of her face. "Alright, cheese or pepperoni?" She got up and stretched out, Steve watching her for a moment. The enthusiastic, mixed responses left Heather to give a small exhale of a laugh as she released the stretches. "Let's do both." She nodded and looked back at Steve "Can you start up the oven to reheat them? I'll get Nancy, see if she wants a bite."

Steve nodded and passively fixed his hair as he stood, walking in the opposite direction to the kitchen. "Hold on."

"Hmmm?" The boy with the tired eyes stepped backward to her.

When Heather passed her hands along the superficies of his hair to correct his mistakes, his eyes drifted closed and he nodded when she was done "Thanks, babe."

"No problem." She smiled and walked upstairs.

"Hey Nance?" Heather's index finger's knuckle knocked against the door.

"Yeah?"

"Steve's heating up the last two pizzas. Want a bite?"

"Sure." Nancy finally opened the door. She looked ready for bed.

"Can we talk a little?"

Heather would be lying if she said that didn't bring a cold shock of anxiety through her chest.

Downstairs, Steve was rounding up the Party to the dinner table as he fixed up the pizzas into the oven to reheat them. Max decided to take up a seat on the kitchen counter, crossing her arms "Are you dating Heather?"

Steve had been crouching in front of the oven when she had asked. He turned around, leaning against the counter across from Max and throwing a dishtowel across his shoulder and crossing his arms. "Uh, honestly? I'm not sure."

"Because if you hurt her I'll neuter you."

"How do you even know that word?"

"I had a dog." Max stuck her chin out proudly.

"In California?"

She nodded and looked down, her pride melting away a little.

"You miss it, huh?"

She nodded and looked up at him, vulnerable blue eyes. He'd been getting that look more often than he cared to get it. Steve was coming to the realization that he wasn't the only broken one in this world.

"You'll go back one day. But at least here you've got your friends. You've got Lucas, and Dustin, El, and Mike."

Max scoffed a little and shook her head "Mike's a dick to me."

"Hey," Steve moved over to lean against the counter next to her.

"He's only doing all of that because he thinks if he's nice to you, El gets the wrong idea. He's just overcompensating. He thinks if he's nice to you, it'll mean less when he's nice with El." Max opened her mouth to interrupt "It's stupid but that's just people your age. Relax. Besides, El is warming up to you, isn't she? Everything will work itself out." He smiled and nudged his elbow to her shoulder. "Now go back out there and be a kid before you can't be anymore. You're too young to feel like shit about all of this, okay?" Max looked up at him with a close-lipped smile and nodded, hopping off of the counter and walking to the dinner table with the rest of the party.

Watching the kids in a heated debate about what to do about the Hydra they just encountered in their campaign didn't give Steve the opportunity to notice Heather sidling up to him. "You're a pretty good big brother to her." She smiled, mirroring Steve when she crossed her arms and watched the kids.

"Well, I've got two younger siblings and I had a pretty great big sister growing up." He looked down at her with a small smile in his eyes.

"Nancy and I talked." Heather cleared her throat and met his gaze, turning to face him. Steve's heart leapt in his throat and his smile faded just in the slightest.

"What'd you two talk about?"

"Just, you know, how it ended between you two. And I get why you might be uncomfortable being around me. I mean, after what happened, I'd be a mess even now." They'd been broken up for 7 months when Steve and Heather met.

Steve stayed quiet, not knowing where this was going. "And I see where this is going between us. I'm not stupid and I'm not new to

this. I know what I feel for you and I have a pretty good idea you feel the same way.” Heather wished she’d gotten herself a glass of water before starting all of this “So, I just wanted to let you know, in case you have any reservations against starting this thing between us, I want you to know that I won’t tell you that I love you until I know I do. Even if you say it when I’m not ready, okay? So whenever this thing happens, I don’t want you to think I could be lying to you. Ever. Even if it hurts to know the truth.” Years later, looking back at this moment, Heather doesn’t remember what was the last thing she had said. What she did know was that it finished with Steve’s hands on either side of her face and his lips against hers. No other first kiss took her breath away even in memory.

6. Everybody Wants to Rule the World

On June 26th Heather Marshall woke up 19 years old. The only person truly freaking out about it was Steve, who had come early to Heather's room to wake her up and drive her to school. "Wake up, Grandma." His voice stirred her awake, kisses left along her jawline. Heather's face pinched up as it prepared a yawn and she looked over at him "Morning, asshole." She smiled and inclined her head forward towards Steve, who made a face "Sorry. Morning breath?"

"Yeah. S'okay. Come on, it's time to get up and spend the best day ever with your coolest friend." Steve leaned on his side on her bed, smiling at her and batting his lashes.

"I didn't know Max was here too."

"Honestly, this is the thanks I get."

Heather smiled, laughing with him. "Come on, get out. I have to get dressed." Heather smiled and moved to sit up, looking over her shoulder at him. "Steve..." His soft brown eyes were vacant for the slightest moment, unresponsive.

"Yeah, yeah, okay. Fine. I'm leaving." He snapped out of whatever trance he was in.

Coming downstairs, Heather saw Steve and Jonathan looking over some pictures Jonathan had taken with the camera he had gotten for Christmas a few years ago. "That looks great." Steve pointed to the picture Jonathan was showing him "The lake and the sun like that. It looks like it's from a movie."

"Thanks." Jonathan smiled to himself, looking down at his feet.

"Could I get copies of these?" Steve looked up at Jonathan, not a whiff of a joke on his face.

Jonathan was taken aback "Yeah." he stuttered out "Sure."

Steve's face broke out into a smile and he nodded "Thanks."

The creaking from the stairs as Heather made her way down them made both boys' heads snap up to look at her. "Hey. You ready?" Steve's hands found his hips, masking anxiety creeping its way through his head. He wasn't ready to fuck up Heather's birthday.

"Uh, yeah. Just need to grab breakfast."

"No need. I'm taking you out."

"What?"

"Yeah. An IHOP just opened like five minutes from school. I'm treating you to flapjacks today." He spoke as Heather got to the last

step of the stairs.

"You're the best." Heather smiled and kissed his cheek, taking his hand. "How's your brother?" She asked as they got into the car. Frankie had gotten sick after Steve had caught whatever cold Heather had. Apparently Steve's parents had burned through it easily and so had Steve's younger brother Troy, but his little brother wasn't feeling too hot and it was getting worse.

"Home sick. I think it'll be fine, though. Don't worry about it." Steve shook his head and bit his lip, avoiding eye contact.

"Something else?"

"No. I mean, yeah." He was having dreams since he got sick and they would get especially lucid after spending the day with Heather or the kids. He was hesitant to bring it up and have it open up the can of worms that was the last two years. He was silent through the entire car ride. Heather's mind felt like a hurricane. Everything was fine between them this morning, what could she have done since then?

"What's wrong?" Heather reached over and touched his hand that was on the shift stick, rubbing her thumb against the back of his hand. Heather's heart sunk into her chest.

"I can't...uh, it's complicated."

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No! God, no." Steve turned to look at her as he parked into the IHOP parking lot.

"Then what's wrong?"

"Let's get a coffee. I'll tell you inside." Steve looked out the window, the people around the IHOP dressed in trench coats and inconspicuous clothing. A little too inconspicuous for his liking.

"Heather," He grabbed her hand as she already had a foot on the gravel outside "Close the door."

Heather's eyes looked into Steve's, a steely gaze she wasn't used to. She nodded and retreated back into the BMW. "Steve," her voice was quiet "you're scaring me."

"Good. Because what I'm gonna tell you should scare the shit out of you, Heather. I didn't want to tell you sooner because...I don't know. You know I'm shit with the true emotions bullshit you're good at. Just listen to me." His hold on both her hands was clammy. "You can't tell any-"

"Steve, come on. Just tell me. Please."

"You can't tell anyone." His voice strengthened, clearing his throat, tilting his head down and looking up at her.

"I won't."

"What you read about in the papers about Hawkins Labs...the radiation thing. Like mini Three Mile Island."

"The stuff that killed Nancy's friend. Barb?"

"Yeah." Steve's voice shook and he swallowed thickly "It's way more than that. And I don't exactly understand all of it perfectly. But, two years ago I had invited Nancy over to this house party since my parents were out of town. You know how it is. We drank a bit and Nancy had brought over Barb. Nancy and I went upstairs and I guess Barb had waited outside by the pool. Jonathan was there and he has a picture of Barb there, on the springboard. In the corner of the picture, there's this thing behind her." Steve blinked wildly a few times, looking anywhere but Heather, who went rigid and entranced in his story "You seen Alien?" When Heather nodded, he mimicked her and bit the flesh of his thumb "It kinda looked like that. It took Barb. I don't know how or what specifically happened to her I just know it killed her. They had a funeral with an empty casket because she...damn, there's really no way not to sound batshit- her body is in the Upside Down, okay? It's this parallel universe but all sorts of fucked up. Like, darker and with monsters and vine shit."

"I'm sorry?"

"Yeah, no, you're right." Steve sighed deeply and leaned back, passing a hand through his hair and shaking his head "it sounds batshit. I sound like the world's worst fucking liar."

"Why would you lie to me about this?"

Steve was silent, biting his bottom lip and shaking his head with a shrug "I don't fucking know."

"Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"So there's a parallel universe that sucks more than ours?"

Despite himself, a laugh escaped his lips "Yeah."

Heather leaned in towards him, eyes wide and bottom lip sucked in. She nodded for him to go on.

"Look at you." Steve sighed, shoulders sagging.

"What?"

"You're excited about this shit."

"Steve, this sounds like it's coming right out of a Lovecraft novel. Let's say I'm mildly intrigued."

"Okay. Can you tone it down? I don't want anyone knowing you know."

“Why?”

“Because the reason this thing was able to go between our universe and its universe is because they fucked up in Hawkins Lab experimenting with kids that had...abilities. Like El.”

“Like Elle?”

“El. Short for Eleven. Because she has a tattoo of a serial number on her arm from Hawkins Lab. I don’t know everything about it but what I do know is that they raised her in the lab and were using her powers as a weapon against the Soviets. One time, she went too deep and opened the door for this thing to come through.”

“Fuck.”

“Majorly.”

“So...the bridge is still open?”

“I don’t think so. I’m pretty sure El closed that last year. But there’s a thing in the Upside Down that controls minds or something. I don’t know. My job was to keep the kids safe. I didn’t ask much more questions than that.” Heather had sunken back into her seat by the time Steve braved the look over to her.

“Shit, Steve.” Heather’s eyes dodged vaguely over the bushes they had parked in front of.

“I know it’s a lot.”

“Yeah.” Heather scoffed “Let’s get pancakes. I’m fucking starving.” Steve had the impression that she was somewhere else despite being right in front of him.

Stepping out of the car, Heather rounded back on Steve and met him in front of the car’s trunk “I don’t get it. Why are you telling me this now?”

Steve sucked in a lungful of air and exhaled deeply through his nose, a hand passing through his hair as he leaned against the trunk “Have you been having weird dreams?”

“Like...”

“Like weird, vivid dreams. Maybe since you got sick?”

Heather sucked on her front teeth and nodded, looking away “Yeah, actually. About my dad.”

Steve’s eyebrows scrunched together and he leaned forward.

“Before he got sick. I keep seeing him in his old classroom. It’s empty except him and this other guy. He looks like Raymond Shaw in the Manchurian Candidate with the suit and everything...” Heather kicked a gravel pebble “I can’t hear what they’re talking about but I think the guy wanted something from my dad and my dad just didn’t

want to give it to him. So he stabs him with this syringe that knocks him out and steals this really thick envelope of papers.” Heather looked up. She’d never told anyone the details of that dream “It’s usually that but sometimes it’s just flashes of images. Sometimes it’s El. Sometimes it’s just plain darkness,-”

“And it’s cold. Coldest cold you’ve ever felt.” Steve finished her sentence, eyes wide “I don’t see your dad in my dreams but the ones with El and the darkness, I’ve had that one since the day I started having a fever. Thought they were just dreams but they didn’t stop when I got better.”

“Yeah, same here. I thought they were just fever dreams. I only started getting better the night after El came over for dinner.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have shared a cup or a fork?”

“Yeah, I think our soda glasses got swapped.” Heather’s eyebrows stitched together in understanding “You think the sickness and the dreams are linked.”

“And spreads like mono.”

Heather’s lips inched up into a sly smile and looked up at Steve “You know something about mono, Harrington?”

Steve’s face mutated from a stark look to hiding a blush, scoffing, and rolling his eyes. He fixed her aviators further up on the bridge of his nose and spoke through the cracks of his smirk “You really are something else, Marshall.”

7. You Give Good Love

Summary for the Chapter:

This one is NSFW towards the middle-end section!

Notes for the Chapter:

This one is NSFW towards the middle-end section! It also has mentions of 70s and 80s music but that's a given.

The school-day drags on longer when Heather has something she'd rather be doing. What was she doing in the biology lab doing prep on a dissection for next week? When could she finally break free? Thankfully, it was Friday so she could ditch at the bell for the pep rally. That was exactly what she did the second the alarm sounded for students to shuffle to the gymnasium. Weaseling her way through the crowd against the stream, she turned a corner and was suddenly running free; right into someone else exiting the home ec kitchens. She'd expected to feel a sudden, hard compression against her chest but was met with a slightly gooey explosion smattered across her face and chest. Wiping the scattered pieces of cake and icing from her eyes, she finally managed to blink a couple of times and see none other than Steve Harrington standing there in a shocked stillness. "Surprise?" He gave a weak smile, a slight violet discoloration underneath his eyes betraying his light-hearted demeanor.

"Well shit." Heather couldn't help but laugh "This was for me?"

"I'm so sorry. I can run into town and-" His ramblings were cut off by Heather's soft and supple lips crashing into his chapped pair. She tasted predominantly of buttercream icing with an underlying taste of strawberry chapstick. Steve's arms wound around her middle and lifted Heather on to the tip of her toes. Her hands narrowly missed his hair at the base of his neck, opting to hold on to the material of his shirt.

"Arguably the best way I've ever had cake." Heather's breath tickled Steve's chin as she pulled away and he thought his heart would leap out of his chest if it hadn't already dropped into his stomach from the second he saw her.

"Any special plans for today, birthday girl?"

"I was about to ask this really cute boy if he was free for a drive."

"Oh yeah?" He chuckled and leaned forward with her, resting against the locker "How'd that go?"

"I don't know. How's your schedule looking, handsome?"

"Gosh, I don't know, Marshall." he toyed with a small chink in the locker. "You know how it is, all these big city girls have so many birthdays and I hate to disappoint- I guess I'm just in high demand."

When Heather just looked at him with a wide smile, he scoffed and shook his head "Sorry, that was stupid."

"No, you're really cute." Heather giggled and leaned forward to leave a chaste peck on his lips. "Now, let's get this sticky white stuff off of my face, huh?" She laughed, taking his hand and relishing in his deep pink blush as he followed her into the girl's bathroom.

It only took them an hour to get all the cake and icing out of Heather's tawny hair and off of her clothes and skin because they kept pausing every few half minutes to steal a kiss. When Steve finally flipped on the engine to his BMW, Heather slid his sunglasses on to the bridge of her nose.

"So how many candles is it this year?"

"19." Heather gave a toothy grin. She couldn't think of any dark cloud that could placate her exuberance. The sun was shining, Steve was by her side, and the windows were rolled down as they traversed Hawkins, Indiana. Over the radio, a mournful symphony of G notes and A minors trickled out as they entered the road going into the woods. Heather moved her hand to the volume knob and brought the lyrics to clarity.

"Oh." Steve made a face "Really?"

"What? It's the Stones." Heather shrugged

"It's so sad."

"It's beautiful." Heather relaxed back into the seat and began singing some of the lyrics. Her voice wasn't anything extraordinary. It was in key and rang true as it skated across the notes, a clear respect for the musicality. It was nothing compared to when Steve parted his lips and let forth what Heather assumed was a hidden wonder of the world. She just stared at him, occasionally chiming in for the chorus. Otherwise, Heather admired him for the full five and a half minutes. Steve turned his head when he noticed Heather's unusual silence "What?" He smiled self-consciously.

"You're a religious experience, Steve Harrington."

Steve couldn't think of what to reply. What do you say to the person

who just called you a religious experience? “You wanna get some ice cream?”

“I could go for that.” Heather smiled, a mutual understanding coming about beneath their words. She was reclined back in the passenger seat, looking between the driver and the road with ease.

Getting to the ice cream place with a barren crowd was a miracle. The school would only let out in five minutes, so they were just nearly beating the tsunami of sweaty kids that would come in for a hot summer day’s treat. Leaning against Steve’s car and eating the strawberry soft serve from a plastic cup, Heather said: “I know a place we could eat this.”

“Hm?” Steve hummed, a plastic spoon’s end sticking out of his mouth.

“Yeah. It’s not too far out. It’s a hill that overlooks Lover’s Lake. You know the one?”

Steve checked his watch before he nodded “Yeah sure. Let’s go.”

They hopped back into the car and drove a couple of minutes to find the lake and park in the public parking usually frequented by hobbyists looking for their catch of the weekend. There were a couple sedans sprawled across the graveled spot, not enough to consider the spot busy; but, that was just Hawkins.

Heather and Steve then trekked up a small, slightly beaten up walking path that reached the sloping summit of a tall hill overlooking the lake. It was the only spot around where one could see the full heart shape of the lake. “I’ve never really seen it sparkle before.” Heather smiled, the bridge of her nose scrunching up as she peered across the sun-soaked view.

“Yeah. It’s gotta be the hottest day of the school year.” Steve said, sitting down on the grass and taking a spoonful of his ice cream-chocolate soft serve with Reese’s pieces.

“Thanks for coming up here with me.” Heather sat down next to Steve, playfully bumping his shoulder to hers.

Steve looked down into his cup as he smiled, “Thanks for asking. I’ve never been up here during the day. It’s actually kinda nice.”

“It’s really sweet what you did, by the way.”

“What?”

“Making me a cake.”

Steve shrugged “Thought I might as well give it a try.”

“I’m glad you did.”

“You didn’t really get to enjoy it, though.”

Heather gently traced her fingertips along his jawline, tilting his head in a suggestion to meet her gaze. No one had baked her a birthday cake since her fifth birthday. "I enjoyed it anyway." She spoke quietly, by way of their faces' proximity to each other.

Steve bit his bottom lip, his hungry stare darting from Heather's focused, hazel eyes to her soft, plump lips. Heather nodded, just slightly, and that was enough for Steve to break the space between them. Both of their eyes were closed, oh-so focused on the simple pleasure of a kiss. Heather's tongue tasted the peanut butter on Steve's breath as she moved forward, ice cream cups ditched to the side. The tip of Steve's ears singed red as Heather moved on to his lap, his hands sliding under her shirt and feeling the tense muscles on her back. Heather mindlessly carded her fingers into his hair from the back of his neck. She only realized she had done this when Steve broke the kiss- his mouth gaping and his eyes closed tightly as he moaned. A blush flashed along his cheeks as he realized how silly he must have sounded like. Instead of hearing the expected silence followed by a giggle, he just heard Heather groan: "Fuck, that's so hot." His top lip was captured between both of her lips, not a moment after and he let out his own groan as his teeth greedily nibbled on her bottom lip. Heather became keenly aware of a denim-clad hardness pressing against her thigh when she repositioned to leave hickies down his neck, his pulse throbbing wildly under her touch. The erotic thrill of Steve's fingernails digging into her back as Heather rocked her hips against his couldn't be quelled even by the beeping of his watch. "What's that?" Heather's voice shuddered.

"Don't worry about it."

He didn't have to tell her twice as she leaned forward again, catching his lips in a small gasp, their lips malleable. Heather's hand snaked down between them and she popped Steve's jean's button, unzipping and sliding her hand down into his pants.

"Fuck." He whined as he leaned his head back, the member now exposed.

Heather shushed him with another hot kiss and let her hand stroke him between their bodies. The pad of her thumb pressed against a vein on the underside of his shaft and moved up to his tip with the rest of her hand, smearing pre-cum to help lubricate.

Between the heavy open-mouthed kisses, the occasional grinding, and the stroking of his member with varying pressure, it didn't take long for Steve to cum; shooting up on to Heather's shirt. His head

collapsed onto her shoulder, breathing hard. As he came back down, he left small, worshipping kisses along her neck "I'll get those stains out." He sighed softly, his breathing still trying to play catch-up.

"Thank you." Heather smiled bashfully, kissing the side of his head.

"Take my flannel." He murmured with lips against her shoulder.

"Yeah." Heather's voice wavered and she slipped off the green and blue checkered shirt and wriggled out of her own— a t-shirt promoting an underground club in downtown Chicago. The flannel looked intentionally large tied around her waist and loosely buttoned. Steve tucked himself back into his pants and inadvertently gave Heather the time to admire just how good he looked in a simple white shirt. "You've got some nerve looking like that, Harrington."

His head snapped back to look at her and he smiled "Yeah, right back at you, Marshall."

Meanwhile, at the Wheeler's residence, Nancy and Mike had convinced their parents to leave for the weekend with Holly to go to Six Flags in Illinois. It would leave the house free for the surprise party everyone else was helping to organize for Heather. Knowing what Heather was going through and how they may not have gotten off on the right foot when she first moved in, Nancy was putting extra elbow grease into the preparation. She'd even made everyone synchronize their watches to make sure there were no lags or delays beyond management. Now Nancy's meticulous-self was losing it. Steve was almost two hours late with the cake and he should have walked through the door with Heather fifteen minutes ago.

"Hon," Jonathan's soft voice broke through Nancy's manic, pacing thoughts "they probably just got caught up in traffic or something. C'mon, you're spiraling." He was still holding a vinyl of Whitney Houston's first album— a self-titled masterpiece with a corny bow on it.

Nancy smiled a little and nodded her chin towards the album "I was wondering why you bought it."

"Now you know." He shrugged "I figured she could spin something cool with this. She showed me once. She spun...I think it was 'Purple Rain' with 'Killer Queen'. It's not even the same time signature."

"Wow." Nancy had no idea what any of this meant, but Jonathan seemed pretty excited so she smiled and nodded along.

"It means she had to either speed one up or slow the other down so they fit the same pace to blend them."

"Uh-huh."

"It's impressive."

"Wow."

"Whatever." Jonathan laughed, seeing Nancy smile "What did you get her?"

"Signed VCR of 16 Candles."

Jonathan rose his eyebrows, jaw loosening "How'd you manage that?"

"Went through her Rolodex and asked her friends what she would want. Just kept asking the right people. They all said how she dragged them to the movies like 10 times to see it. So," Nancy was definitely proud of her investigative abilities "I kept asking if they had any way for me to get some memorabilia, but instead they all pointed me to this guy who Heather knows who works with the government- an old colleague of her dad's, and he was able to get me in contact with Molly Ringwald's agent-"

"Shut the fuck up."

"I know. And I just told them about Heather and if they could ship me an autograph and they sent back the VCR signed."

Jonathan was silent for a moment, a silent appreciation of Nancy who wore a nice shade of smug on her face. "Damn."

"That's right."

"What'd Steve get her?"

Nancy shrugged "I don't know. He wouldn't say. He was really concerned with keeping it a secret." They stood in a silent understanding for a moment, sipping on punch, before Nancy asked quickly and with a much higher pitch of voice than before "Do you think they're dating?"

Jonathan scoffed "You don't?"

"I mean, they never said, is all."

"Have you seen them?"

"Yeah, but I mean, are they- like- are they steady?"

"All I know is that they're almost thirty minutes late to her own party."

Just as Jonathan spoke, the door creaked open and Heather's laugh bubbled into the shocked still house. "Babe, I'm gonna trip." Her hands were holding his over her eyes as she waddled into the room with a wide, toothy grin. Hopper and Joyce quickly extinguished their cigarettes and ran over to the light switch to turn everything off. The amount of exuberant chaos that erupted the second Steve lifted his hands from her eyes was incomparable.